

## [Earnest Cook]

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[Tarrant?] Co., [Dist.?] 7

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Earnest Cook, 56, born Apr. 15, 1881, on the Tarleton Ranch in Erath Co., Tex. His father was the ranch foreman at the time. Earnest began to ride the range with the other hands at the age of seven. He left home when 22, and secured employment with the W. Ranch in West Texas. After 8 Yrs., he secured employment on the Hat Ranch in N.M. Two Yrs. later, he was employed on the L.F.D. Ranch at Yellow House Canyon, N.M. He was employed two Yrs. later on a horse ranch at White Oak Mountain, N.M. After six Yrs., he returned to Texas and was employed a year and a half on the Swanson Ranch in Haskell Co., Tex. He established his own ranch in Erath Co. after leaving the Swanson Ranch, He has remained there since. The ranch comprises 1500 acres. He married Allie Silvers in 1902. Four children were born to them. His story:

“My name is Earnest Cook, and I'm 56 years old. My birth took place on the 15th of April, 1881. My home for the entire 56 years has been on a ranch. I was born on the old Tarleton Ranch, located at Blufdale BluffDale , in Erath County, Texas. My father was the ranch

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foreman. I have one of the old Tarleton Ranch branding irons in my possession as a keep sake. T R N was the brand.

“To tell exactly when I learned to ride is almost impossible because my memory doesn't go back to that early period of my life. I guess my father started teaching me to ride by tying me on [a?] hoss with a rope, because I don't remember when I could not ride. When I was seven years old, I was able to ride good enough to be used as a cowhand, and was used as a rider. Now you can understand me when I say I actualt grew up in the saddle.

“I worked on the [Tarleton?] Ranch until I was 22 years old, and then joined up with the W outfit in West Texas. The Ranch headquarters were situated on the spot Wink, Texas, is now. C12- [2/11/41?]- [Texas?] 2 Widdy Johnson was the owner, and the brand was a W. I worked for the outfit about eight years, and then joined the Hat outfit in New Mexico.

“Scott Robinson and Winfield Scott were the owners, and it was located where the Hobbs oil field is now. Their brand was an O on the jaw, the outlines of a hat on the side, and an X on the hip. I worked two years for them, and then joined the L F D outfit.

“The L F D was owned by an Eastern syndicate, and was located at Yellow House Canyon. L F D was the brand. I worked two years for them, then went 100 miles west of Roswell to a place called White Oak Mountain, and busted hosses on a hoss ranch owned by Clay McGousle. After busting hosses for six months, I returned to Texas. I lit in Haskell County, and joined up with the Swanson Ranch. His brand was S M S. I worked 18 months for him, and then returned to my old home in Erath County.

“I began to establish my own ranch after my return. I've been here ever since my return, and now have a 1500 acre ranch where the old Tarleton Ranch was. I'm running 250 mother cows now. I've had considerable more, and also less since I started. In fact, just four years ago, I was down to zero but I'm on the road up again and what I have is paid for.

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“From what I've related so far, it should be evident that I know something about range and ranch life, and the work connected with it. I will tell how we lived first.

“Of course, on a large ranch, we lived in the open practically all the time. Our bunk was, “The green below, and the Blue above”, 3 if it wasn't raining. We rolled ourselves in tarpaulins, and used our saddles for pillows.

“Our chuck ran strong to beans, besides meat. We had all the beef we wanted because we could kill a choice yearling whenever we wanted beef, eat the choice cuts, and throw the balance away. Antelope then ran in herds of hundreds and it was a simple matter to kill one when it was wanted for meat. We ate a great quantity of antelope because it is tender and excellently flavored meat. Black coffee was our drink with the meals, and our bread was of the best. It was called sour dough bread. The cookys knew how to make it right. I have seen [?] to the cover of the camp oven. The camp oven was made of steel. To bake with it, hot embers were placed under, and on top of it. Oh say, I don't want to forget the syrup. We always had plenty of syrup.

“All the food was hauled in a wagon called the, “Chuck Wagon”, also the tarpaulins and such other supplies that were necessary. I believe that covers the method of handling the cowhand's chuck.

“The work of a cowhand is varied. One of the jobs I have often been asked to explain how we determined the correct brand to place on a calf. As soon as a calf has been roped, it will begin to bawl and start to pitching. While it is elevating, a hand grabs its forefront hoof, and flips the critter on its back, then folds the doubled leg back against its side. In that manner, the calf is held until the hot branding iron is applied.

“The roundup as you know, to the gathering together of the cattle. The cattle may be owned by several people. The process of cutting out the critters wanted is the next step to the roundup. Cutting out to riding into the herd, and roping the critter wanted. 4 When

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branding calves, of course those are the critters roped. Each owner has their brands ready, and the owner of the calf would be ready to place his brand. The question of ownership was determined by the calf's mother who knows the voice and bawl of her calf. The calf begins to bawl as soon as it is roped, then the mother goes to it. Since the mother cow has her owner's brand on her, the proper brand is easy to determine

"It requires practice to become proficient in flipping a calf as well as to rope. Both are an art. I was very good at roping. We changed horses every hour because the best cow-horse couldn't stand cutting out for a much longer period. A roper usually had six or seven horses for his use. Generally, the kind used were the Spanish and Steeldust breeds mixed. The Steeldust breed is a racing stock and made the best cow-horse. The Spanish blood gave durability, and the racing stock gave speed. A Spanish pony never became completely broke. A rider can expect it to pitch at any time but the animal understood his cow job.

"Right here, I want to mention the method of flipping a calf on my ranch. I employ a man on my ranch that can flip a calf by a slap of his hand on the side of the critter's jaw. He never fails, and it saves lots of time and labor during branding time. He is the first and only man I know of that can flip a calf with his hand. However, my son has caught the knack, and is now able to accomplish this feat. I've tried it, but can't get the knack.

"I enjoy all the work on the range with one exception, I never cared much for the drive. It was a slow and monotonous job because it was necessary to let the cow graze, and slowly move 5 them forward. About seven miles a day was the average distance covered. There was a time when driving over the trails was interesting, due to the Indian menace, but that was before my time.

"One of the cattlemen's troubles that the public thinks in over, is cattle rustling. This is a mistake. Cattle rustling is still being done, only the method is different. Instead of riding up to the herd on a cow pony and driving the herd off, the modern rustler now drives a truck

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up to the herd, loads it, then drives off to some market. This task isn't difficult because ready markets are easy to locate as the job is done in a few hours, and in most cases, the cattle are butchered before the owner is aware of the steal.

“There were a number of notorious rustlers while I was in New Mexico, and during my early life on the range. There was an unusual incident that took place north of Monument Springs. A rustler drove off 200 head of X I T cattle. He changed the brand by putting a line through the X making it a star. Thus the brand was, [-X-I T?]. He drove the cattle to old Mexico, then returned and was caught. Complying with a request of the cattlemen, the State authorities of New Mexico postponed the trial indefinitely, providing that the rustler would go to old Mexico and remain. This was done to get rid of him because he was one of the greatest menaces the cattlemen had to contend with. The arrangement was a success. The rustler's name has passed out of my mind.

“One notorious rustler I shall never forget. That person was Tom Ross, of Gaines County, Texas. He was one of my best friends at one time. He and I rode the range together and at one 6 time, he was dependable in all of his dealings, a man who was a true friend. He became one of the big rustlers of the Southwest. He killed an inspector for the Cattlemen's [Association?], a Mr. Ellison, who attempted to [capture?] Tom. Ross was with his partner, Milt Goode. They both escaped. Later, Ross killed a ranch foreman in Utah, then committed suicide. I attended his funeral. In spite of the fact he turned out to be one of the most desperate of the rustlers and killers, I couldn't help but feel kindly toward him, due to our previous associations. He had one peculiarity I never saw in any other person. No matter when you turned your gaze on him, you always found him looking at you. He always watched the party next to, and around him.

“In those days, the six-shooter was a part of a man's dress the same as his pants were. No one would think of going out with out his gun on. All arguments were settled with a gun. Fists were too soft.

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"I trailed cattle rustlers several times. I shall relate one chase and its ending. I was working on the Hat Ranch when a herd stampeded during a hail storm, and after a check up, 85 head had strayed. We picked up their trail after the storm, and noticed hoss tracks. Those tracks told us that rustlers were driving the critters. Jeff Cowden, Tom Ogles, and myself, followed the trail for two days. We came to a canyon at the end of the second day, and sighted the rustlers there.

"We expected a fight, so we approached them ready for action. Jeff Cowden was in the lead. He had the fastest hoss. The three of us started into the canyon but the rustlers had been watching 7 and started to riding and shooting at the same moment. We started after them, and it developed into a running gun fight with a constant rain of bullets flying into both parties of men. Jeff received a wound, getting hit in the ankle and the ligament was cut shortly after the shooting started. I received a bullet through my hat, knocking it off, then Jeff received got clipped again, a piece of his collar bone being chipped. Those rustlers were hitting their mark, and showed they could handle a gun by being able to hit often while on the dead run. Jeff was getting the worst of it because he was in the lead. He was spilling considerable blood after the second hit, and we called to him, demanding that he drop behind but he paid us no mind, and kept on riding and shooting that six gun.

"We finally made a hit. One of the rustlers got it in the fleshy part of his leg, but they kept on shooting and riding. Then we made the second hit. It got the other rustler in the arm. I don't know which one of us made the hit. Both the rustlers whirled their hosses and put their hands into the air. We rode up to them, and took their guns. We found that one of our hits had broken an arm bone. The rustler began immediately to talk, saying, "What are you fellows going to do with us?"

"Take you into Roswell and turn you over to the law", we replied.

"Well, that will be fine. We don't care for rope parties", was their answer. Stringing rustlers was quite common, but we weren't that kind of people. After dressing the wounds, we

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placed the three of them on their hosses, and made them precede us into 8 Roswell. I asked them what their names were before we started. The one with the shattered arm bone said, "My name is Al Jennings", Another one said, "My name is Clay Foster". They were tried and given a five years sentence, but were paroled in 13 months. We three cow hands received \$500.00 for the capture. The money was made up by the cattlemen of the district. That was Al Jenning's first capture and conviction. Afterwards, he became the notorious bandit of the Southwest.

"Fighting rustlers and attending a herd was a he man's job, so when the cow hand played, he played as a he man. When work didn't prevent it on pay days, the cow hand went to town. The stories about shooting up saloons are true but when the boys practiced shooting, using the bar fixtures as a target, the damage was always paid for with interest. There was one exception. That was when the barkeeper did some nasty trick on the bunch, or just one of them. The smart bartender soon learned not to interfere, but to let the boys have their way, as he knew he would be paid for all the destruction, and some in addition. I've often seen a bartender pull his apron off, and throw it with the keys to the place to the boys and say, 'The place is yours. Have a good time'.

"I married Allie Silvers in 1902, and reared a family of four children. They are all married now, except the youngest. He, like his father did, is starting his life on the range but he will miss the rough part of it.